

Questions and Answers

Eagle-Caliente Complex Emergency Wild Horse Gather

February 2016

Q. Why are these gathers necessary?

A. Excess wild horses from the Eagle Herd Management Area (HMA) and Caliente Complex Herd Area (HA) are a safety concern on U.S. Highway 93 and Nevada State Route 322.

Q. How many horses will be gathered and how many will be removed from the range?

A. The BLM Ely District will gather and remove up to 50 excess wild horses from public and private lands in and outside the Eagle HMA. Up to 50 wild horses will be gathered and removed from public and private lands in and outside the Caliente Complex HA.

Q. What will the remaining herd population of this Herd Management Area/Herd Area be?

A. The post-gather population of the Eagle HMA will be 1,320 wild horses. Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the Eagle HMA is 100-210 wild horses. The post-gather population of the Caliente Complex HA will be 746 wild horses. The Caliente Complex is managed for zero wild horses.

Q. Is the BLM removing horses to make room for more cattle grazing?

A. No. The removal of wild horses and burros from public rangelands is carried out to ensure rangeland health, in accordance with land-use plans that are developed in an open, public process. These land-use plans are the means by which the BLM carries out its core mission, which is to manage the land for multiple uses while protecting the land's resources. Authorized livestock grazing on BLM-managed land has declined by nearly 50 percent since the 1940s; actual (as distinguished from authorized) livestock grazing on public rangelands has declined by 30 percent since 1971.

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses when there are already more than 41,000 animals in holding?

A. The BLM must remove thousands of wild horses and burros from the range each year to protect public lands from the environmental impacts of herd overpopulation – such as soil erosion, sedimentation of streams, and damage to wildlife habitat. Currently, the Western rangeland free-roaming population of more than 38,000 (as of February 2011) *exceeds by nearly 12,000* the number the BLM has determined can exist in balance with other public rangeland resources and uses. Although the BLM tries to place as many removed animals as possible into private care through adoption or sales, the public's demand for adoptable wild horses has declined sharply in recent years, leaving the agency in the unsustainable position of gathering excess horses while its holding costs spiral upward. Interior Secretary Salazar and BLM Director Bob Abbey announced a set of proposals in October 2009 that represented the first step in putting the BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program on a sustainable track (see www.blm.gov for details).

Q. Why is the BLM removing horses that appear to be or are in good condition?

A. The BLM gathers horses with different bodily conditions, including some that appear to be or are in good condition. The agency pro-actively gathers excess animals from overpopulated herds on a three-to-five year cycle to prevent worst-case scenarios in which removed horses would be emaciated because of insufficient forage on the range.

Q. Where do the removed horses go?

A. Excess wild horses removed from the range will be shipped to the Axtell Contract Off-Range Corrals in Axtell, Utah, where they will be prepared for the BLM's adoption program or long-term holding in Midwestern pastures.

Q. What happens to horses that are not adopted?

A. Unadopted horses are fed and cared for in either short-term corrals or long-term Midwestern pastures. Wild horses over 10 years old and those passed over for adoption at least three times become eligible for sale, a transaction in which the title of ownership to the animals passes immediately from the Federal government to the buyer. (In the adoption process, the title of ownership passes from the Federal government to the adopter after the individual provides one year of humane care.) While a December 2004 law granting the BLM sale authority authorizes the agency to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," the Bureau has not been and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers." All horses in holding retain their status as "wild" animals and remain under the BLM's protection.

Q. Will any of the horses be sent to slaughter?

A. No. As noted above, while a December 2004 amendment to the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act authorizes the BLM to sell sale-eligible animals "without limitation," the BLM has not been and is not selling any wild horses to slaughterhouses or to "killer buyers."

Q. What veterinary treatment will the removed horses receive?

A. The horses will be aged (based on the condition of their teeth), de-wormed, vaccinated, blood-tested, and freezemarked (marked with a cold brand).

Q. How far, in relation to the trap site, are the horses and foals being herded?

A. The distance that animals are brought to the gather site depends on the terrain, environmental conditions, and animal health.

Q. Why does the BLM use helicopters to gather horses?

A. Helicopter-driven gathers have proven to be more humane, effective, and efficient than other types of gather methods when large numbers of animals need to be removed over wide areas or rugged terrain. Helicopters are able to move horses and burros at a proper pace; moreover, helicopter pilots can keep mares and foals together better than a horseback rider and can also better move the animals around such barriers as deep ravines, fences, or roads.

Q. Does the BLM use whips to move the horses through the pens and chute?

A. The BLM uses flags or noise-making paddles to move horses through the pens and chutes. The flags are usually made by attaching a plastic grocery bag to the end of a sorting stick or buggy whip. The flag prevents the stick or whip from hitting the horse with any sort of impact or sting to it. Seeing and hearing the plastic flag motivates the animal to move away from the

source of the stimulus. This technique is similar to those used for domestic and wild horses being trained using resistance-free methods.

Q. How many of the mares gathered during this roundup will the BLM treat with the fertility-control vaccine PZP?

A. None

Q. How does PZP affect the mares?

A. The PZP application doesn't interfere with a mare's pregnancy if the vaccine is applied while she is pregnant. The foal will be born normal and healthy. The PZP vaccine will start to take effect while the mare is pregnant, so after the foal is born, the mare will be less likely to become pregnant for about the next two years.

Indications from research conducted on Assateague Island National Seashore (managed by the National Park Service) suggest that PZP does not affect the foaling seasonality. While it remains to be seen if this will hold true on Western rangelands, there is no indication that there are any negative effects on foal survival following treatment of a herd.

Q. Where may I learn more about the Wild Horse and Burro Program?

A. Please visit the BLM's Website at www.blm.gov